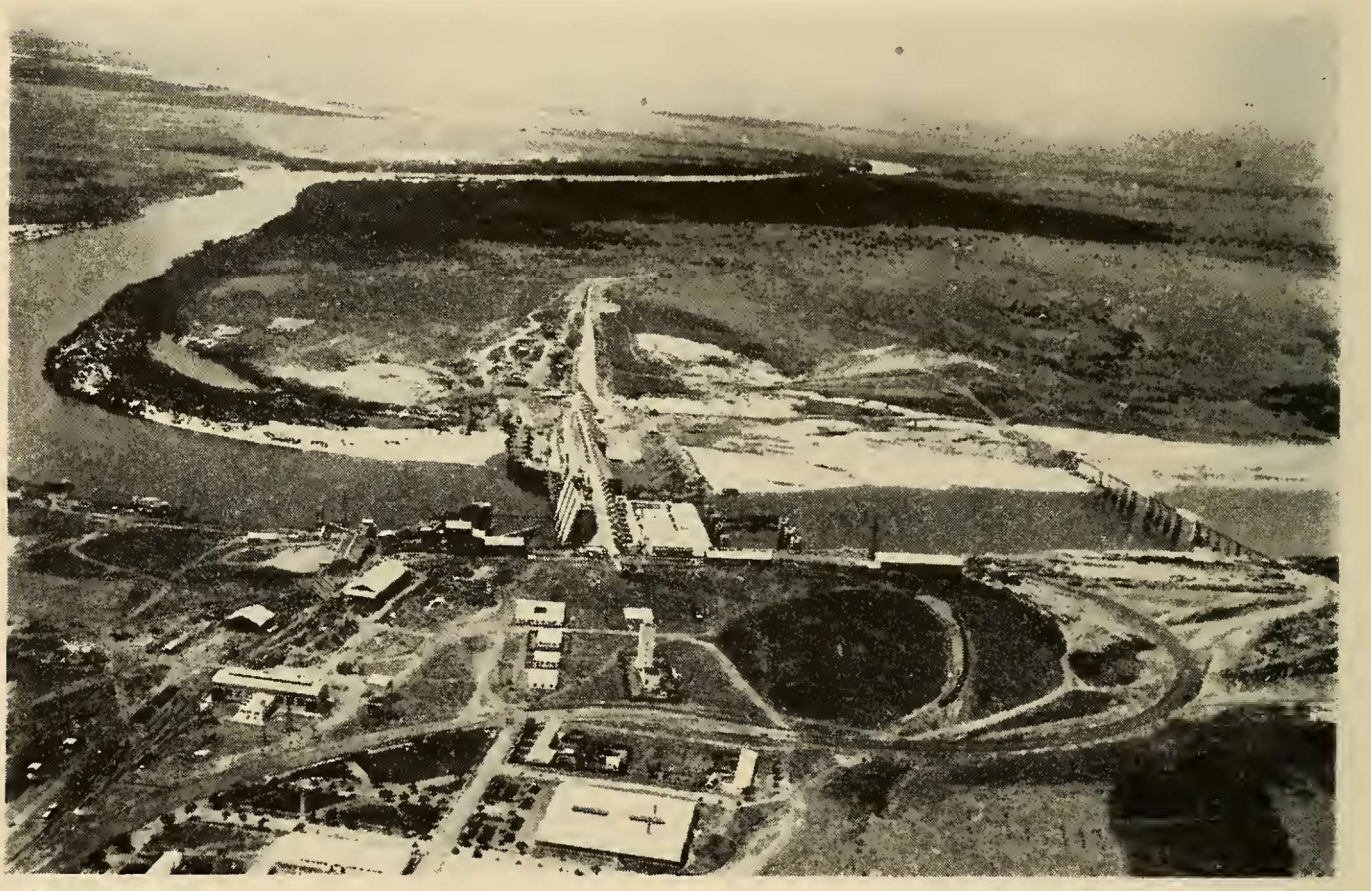
Uruguay's Big Power Development

On December 26, 1945, the wheels began to turn in the great Río Negro power project in Uruguay. The first generating unit at Rincón del Bonete was officially opened on that date by the President of the Republic, Dr. Juan José Amézaga, at a ceremony attended by cabinet ministers, other government officials, and the United States Ambassador in Uruguay.

This enormous enterprise, one of the largest of its kind in the continent, has been in the building since September 1937. In the beginning the work was given over to the Consal (German Consortium), with which group the Uruguayan Government signed a contract in April 1937. The Consortium was composed of five companies, three in Germany and two in Buenos Aires, each of which was charged with different parts of the installation and supply job. The Uruguayan Government shared in the work, too, and as time went by, the capacity of Uruguayan technicians to take over and bring the work to completion was evidenced when the contract with the Consal was rescinded in May 1942 as a result of the war.

The director of the work, Luis Giorgi, former dean of engineering at the University of Uruguay, spent 14 months in the United States studying similar projects, such as TVA, and working with the State Department, the War Production Board, and the Export-Import Bank of Washing-



Courtesy of Rione

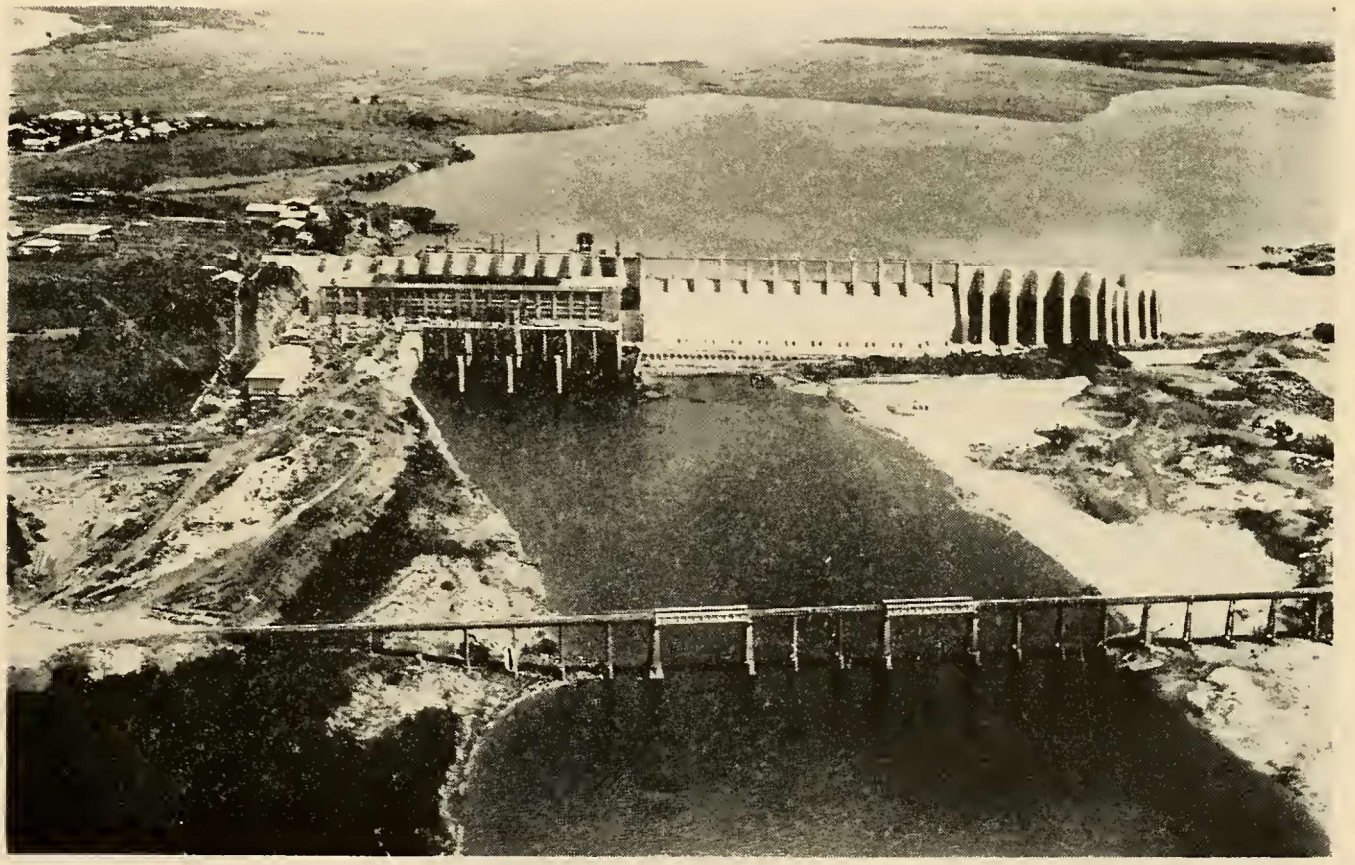
RINCÓN DEL BONETE

General view of the river and the dam while construction was still in progress.

ton to obtain priorities, technical assistance, and loans. On April 22, 1942, the Export-Import Bank made a loan of $12,000,000 to the Republic of Uruguay for materials, equipment, and services for the Río Negro project. As of December 31, 1945, $5,776,179 of that amount had been disbursed.

The Río Negro, largest river in Uruguay, has its source in Brazil, and flows across Uruguay in a southwesterly direction. Rincón del Bonete is located about five miles above Paso de los Toros, in the west central part of the country, on the border between the Departments of Durazno and Tacuarembó. The first unit of the plant is now sending electric power to certain residential sections of Montevideo, to the industrial area, including the National Packing Plant, and all along the route of the central Montevideo-Rivera highway, serving small towns and the cities of Canelones and Florida, from the capital to the La Cruz district, some 75 miles to the north. The power produced at Rincón del Bonete goes to Montevideo through two independent transmission lines, each 150 miles long. These lines will be connected with the city's already existing power system, which will enable the joint network to supply other outlying communities, some of them as much as 80 miles beyond the city.

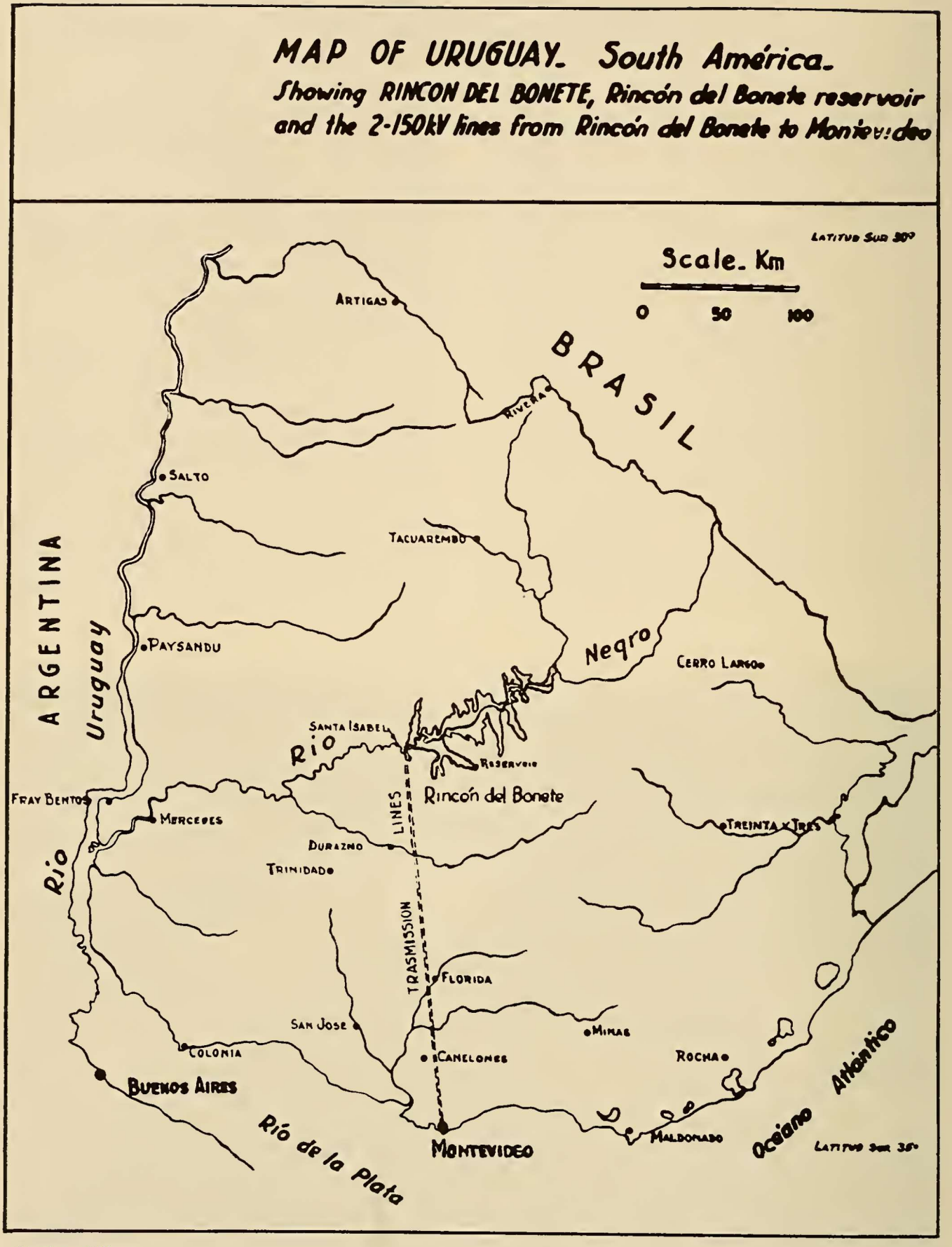
The second generating unit is expected to be in operation early in April 1946, the third by March 1947, and the fourth and last by December 1947. When the project is completed, Rincón del Bonete, together with the present plants of Montevideo, will produce 537 million kilowatt hours of electric energy per year. Of this, Río Negro will supply about 88 percent.



Courtesy of Rione

THE DAM AS VIEWED FROM THE DOWN-STREAM SIDE

The lake is seen forming above the dam



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MAP OF URUGUAY

The location of the dam and the two transmission lines that serve the Montevideo area are shown here.

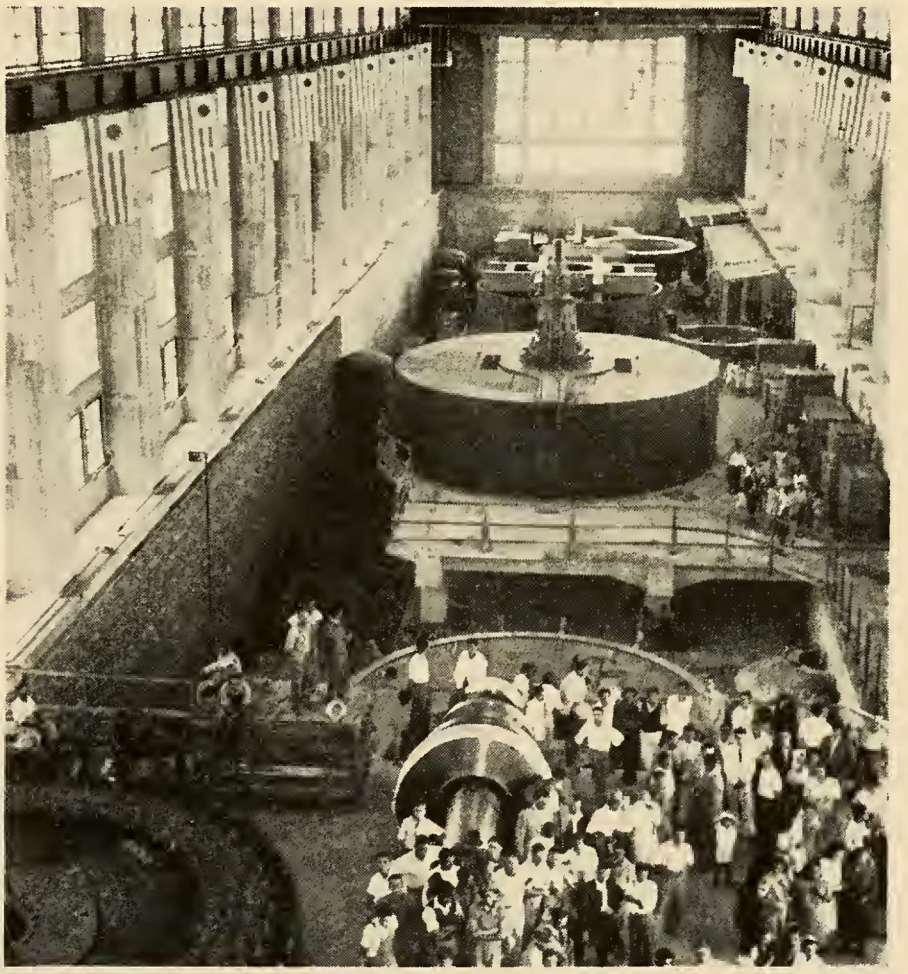
The economic importance of this gigantic project to the Republic of Uruguay is easily apparent to even the most casual eye. Uruguay is a country poor in native fuels, a circumstance that has placed it in the position of having to depend on foreign sources for the production of energy. During the war, maritime traffic difficulties led to the exhaustion of the nation's fuel reserves to such an extreme that at times paralysis of electric power plants was feared. The power stations had to resort to burning large amounts of corn to keep their service at needed levels. This, of course, was an economic waste, and gave even more reason for expediting completion of the Río Negro project, When the war started, the dam was about 90 percent completed, but no work had yet been done on the powerhouse superstructure.

The entry into public service of the power plant is a great step forward. Completion of the entire project will mean light, power, water, irrigation, new roads, agricultural and industrial development over a wide area; in short, it will be an immeasurably valuable contribution to the economic and social progress not only of the metropolitan area but of the whole nation as well.

The Río Negro project was first conceived and promoted in 1904 by the Uruguayan engineer Victor B. Sudriers, who has fathered it since that date and is vice president of the board of directors. Various investigations, reports, and estimates have been made by Uruguayan and foreign engineers since 1909, when daily stream-

RINCÓN DEL BONETE POWERHOUSE

Interior view when the first unit, seen in the foreground, was put into operation. Parts of the second unit, also seen in the picture, were then being assembled.



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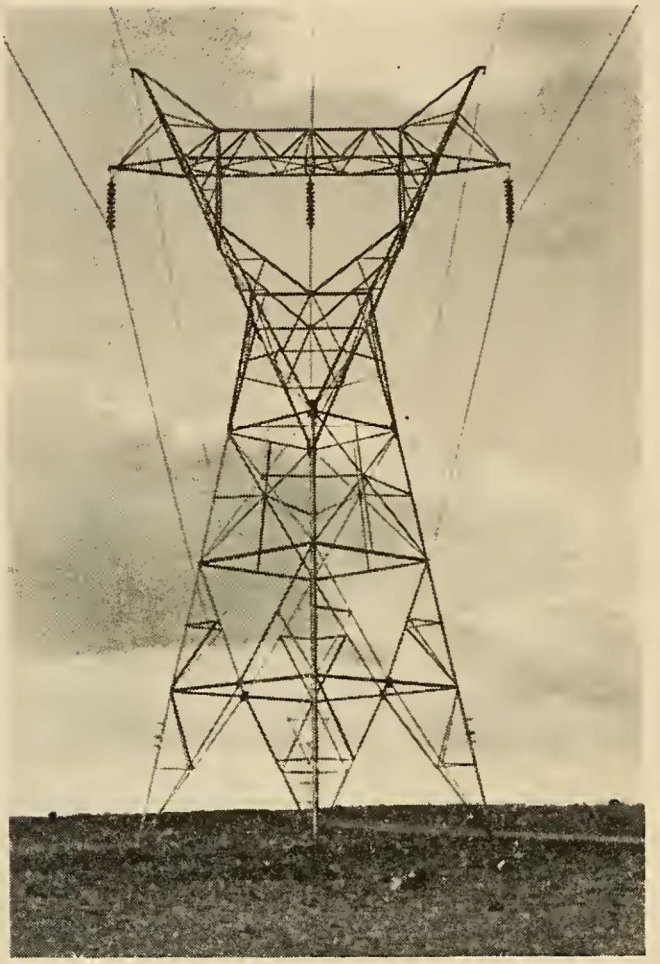
flow reports were first inaugurated. The final study, general plans and specifications upon which the project was financed in 1937, were prepared by Professor Adolf Ludin of Germany. From the date of financing, the project has been ably prosecuted under the management of Luis Giorgi, mentioned above, and a staff and board of directors of former professors and students of the University of Uruguay.



Courtesy of Rione

TRANSMISSION TOWER

Two 150-mile transmission lines send power to Montevideo.